

season's greetings



Year 2007 newsletter

Thanks for your ongoing support of the project. Here is our 2007 newsletter to tell you about some results from the latest questionnaires you completed, to keep you informed about what we've been doing, and to let you know about our plans for 2008.

In the past year, we sent out surveys to all study members. Although these reached most of you easily, some people were harder to locate. As we want to keep in touch with as many of you as possible, we are still trying to make contact with a few study members. We have really enjoyed finding out about what you are doing and how you are getting along. Many thanks to everyone who took part in the survey. Here are some of the results to date.

What you were doing in 2006–2007

In terms of work, most of you were in paid employment (84%), others were self-employed (7%), some were looking for work (8%), and a few (3%) were taking a long-term holiday or break. A small number were parents who were caring for their children full-time (4%). The hours usually worked ranged from 2 to 90 hours per week, the average being 38 hours. Around one-quarter of you were studying full-time or part-time.

Although paid employment was the main source of income for most of you (90%), many received other income support, for example from parents (11%) and/or the government (14%). Three-quarters of you were living comfortably or doing

alright financially, but around one-fifth were just getting by, and a few of you (4%) were finding it difficult to make ends meet.

Living arrangements were quite varied at this stage in your lives. Over a third of you were still living with your parents (39%). About a quarter were living with a partner or spouse (27%) and another quarter were sharing a house or flat (22%). Some of you were living alone (8%).

Over half of you were in committed relationships, whether living together (33%) or not (28%), with 8% of you engaged and roughly the same number married. However, many of you were not dating (31%) or were dating casually (6%). The most common ways you met romantic partners were through friends, or at a bar/pub/nightclub, party, school, work or tertiary institution. Of course, relationships have not always run smoothly, with over half of you having experienced a relationship breakup (59%) during the past few years that deeply affected you.

Health and exercise

The majority of you were in good health (52%) and many were in excellent

health (26%), but quite a few of you were only in fair health (18%) and a few were in poor to very poor health (5%). Unfortunately, long-term, physical or mental health problems or disabilities were fairly common (22%).

Over half of you played sport or exercised two or more times a week (54%), and nearly one-quarter did so weekly (22%), while only a very few never exercised at all.

Testing the limits and breaking the law

As in past surveys, we included questions about breaking the law and other behaviours that "test the limits". Most study members had engaged in very few illegal behaviours in the past year. However, 65% of you had been drunk in a public place at least once, including 19% of you who had done so more than 10 times. Fewer (13%) had been in contact with the police for a driving-related offence. Other activities that some ATP participants engaged in were: physically fighting with other people (10%), property damage (6%), selling illegal drugs (6%), shoplifting (5%), and possession, buying or selling of stolen goods (5%).

Changes, losses or problems in the past year

The early 20s are often a time of change. Most of you (65%) experienced at least one change, loss or problem in the past year. The most commonly experienced

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Thanks for your fantastic support—we couldn't keep going without you!

change was starting a new job or changing jobs (10%) and for most of you this had a positive effect on your lives. Other common positive events included moving house (7%), moving out of home (5%) and completing university or TAFE courses (5%). Many also had difficult experiences, such as the death of a close relative (for example a grandparent) or a health problem or illness (4%). Nine per cent had experienced a relationship breakup during the past year—although this was a bad experience for most, some found that it had a positive effect on their lives.

Attitudes about parenthood

Over three-quarters of you thought that you would probably or definitely have a child in the future, with only 2% definitely ruling out the prospect. Some of you are already biological or stepparents (8%). In deciding when to have a child (or another child), an important issue for many of you was the responsibility involved. Other important issues were your own and your partner's job security, being able to maintain your standard of living and being able to buy a home or a better home.

Positive development

We are currently trying to understand how to promote positive and healthy development in young people, and are examining a wide range of factors that might be involved. Using surveys completed when you were 19–20 years old, we found that those of you who were developing positive strengths had several characteristics in common. You were:

- trusting and tolerant of others;
- accepting of those with different ethnic origins;
- participating in various community groups;
- actively taking on social responsibilities;
- confident that the police, the courts and large organisations act fairly and reasonably;
- responsible, self-controlled and empathetic; and

Contact us

Remember you can contact us at the Australian Institute of Family Studies and check our website www.aifs.gov.au/atp for updates on the project.

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- satisfied with your achievements, your personal and social life, and the direction that your life was taking.

Based on these characteristics, we developed a measure of positive development that we plan to use to look at earlier factors that predict positive outcomes at 19–20 of age. We are also really looking forward to seeing how our findings relate to how your lives are going now.

Future plans

Next year, we will continue to look at the trends from the 2006–2007 survey, including positive development and your perspectives on relationships, and aspirations for marriage and parenthood. We are also continuing our exploration of your driving experiences and behaviour, with our second report on this to be published in 2008. And we will be looking at trends in alcohol use from adolescence to adulthood too. All this work will provide important new information that will be of great use for policy development and services for young people in Australia. There is a great deal of interest in the insights coming from our unique study.

News from the ATP Team

Ann Sanson, John Toumbourou and Diana Smart have all received promotions this year. Ann is now Professor in Paediatrics at the University of Melbourne, as well as coordinating the Research Network of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. John is now Professor and Chair of Health

Psychology at Deakin University, and is also continuing his work at the Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Children's Hospital. Diana has taken a senior leadership role with *Growing Up in Australia* (the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, LSAC) at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, but will also continue to work on the ATP. The ATP has been an invaluable source of learning for LSAC, which is a large study following 10,000 young children from all over Australia. Primrose Letcher has continued to work part-time for the ATP, and the knowledge she has gained from our study has helped her in her other role as a clinical psychologist working with young people. Finally, this year we have welcomed Mary Hawkins to the ATP team—her extensive research experience has been very valuable for the team. We plan to employ more researchers next year to assist with our work.

Our thanks

Once again, our sincere thanks for your participation in the ATP. The project's fame continues to grow each year, with interest shown by the media, the wider community, researchers and governments, both within Australia and overseas. The study could not continue without your fantastic support and we appreciate that it can be an effort to complete our surveys when your lives are busy. Our best wishes for the festive season, and we hope you have a very happy and rewarding 2008.



This is a joint project between the Australian Institute of Family Studies (Diana Smart), the Royal Children's Hospital (Frank Oberklaid), the University of Melbourne (Ann Sanson & Margot Prior) and Deakin University (John Toumbourou). The project is led and supported by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and is also supported by a grant from the Australian Research Council.